

Message Text

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47

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-09 ISO-00 ERDA-05 AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6075

INFO AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ENRG, MT, LY

SUBJECT: MINTOFF CLAIMS MALTA'S OIL SOURCES NOT LIMITED TO LIBYA

REFS: A. VALLETTA 527, MARCH 20, 1974; B. VALLETTA 185,
JANUARY 30, 1974; C. VALLETTA 2435, DECEMBER 11, 1973

1. PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF, IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONING BY THE NATIONALIST OPPOSITION ON OIL IMPORTS INTO MALTA, ON MARCH 17 IS REPORTED TO HAVE ANNOUNCED IN PARLIAMENT THAT THE GOM IS FREE TO BUY "PETROL" FROM ANY SOURCE AND AT ANY PRICE AND CONDITION. HE ADDED THAT IT HAS MERELY BEEN TAKEN FOR GRANTED IN MALTA THAT "PETROL" WAS BEING PURCHASED ONLY FROM LIBYA; THAT ACTUALLY THE GOM WAS IMPORTING OIL FROM VARIOUS SOURCES AT THE BEST AVAILABLE PRICES AND CONDITIONS.

2. DESPITE OPPOSITION COMPLAINTS, THE PRIME MINISTER CONTINUED TO REFUSE TO DIVULGE TO PARLIAMENT SPECIFIC PRICES OR OTHER DETAILS RELATED TO GOM OIL IMPORTS AS "NOT IN THE NATIONAL

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INTEREST." HE CHALLENGED THE OPPOSITION TO A TELEVISED

DEBATE ON THE OIL QUESTION AT ANY TIME; A CHALLENGE THAT
WAS REFUSED BY NATIONALIST LEADER DR. G. BORG OLIVIER WITH
THE RETORT THAT THE APPROPRIATE PLACE FOR SUCH A DISCUSSION
WAS IN PARLIAMENT, NOT ON TELEVISION.

3. COMMENT: WHILE THE DIFFERENT NEWSPAPER REPORTS OF
MINTOFF'S STATEMENTS TO PARLIAMENT REGARDING OIL IMPORTS VARY,
THEY AGREE THAT THE SUBSTANCE CONVEYED BY THE PRIME MINISTER
WAS THAT LIBYA IS NOT AND HAS NOT BEEN THE ONLY SOURCE OF
OIL SUPPLIES FOR MALTA. THIS CLAIM IS CONTRARY TO THE GENERAL
IMPRESSION CONVEYED IN EARLIER EMBASSY REPORTS, BUT IN LINE
WITH MORE RECENT STORIES HEARD HERE THAT MALTA HAS BEEN
PURCHASING "DISTRESS CARGO" OIL SHIPMENTS FROM TIME TO TIME
FROM VARIOUS SOURCES. THE QUESTION OF OIL PRICES CONTINUES
TO BE AN IMPORTANT POLITICAL ISSUE IN MALTA, AND A SORE SUBJECT
WITH THE AVERAGE MALTESE. MINTOFF HAS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT
HIS GOVERNMENT IS REALIZING A PROFIT ON GASOLINE SALES, BUT
VIGOROUSLY DENIES THE ALLEGATION THAT THIS IS, IN EFFECT, A
HIDDEN TAX ON THE MALTESE MOTORIST. THIS ISSUE WILL CONTINUE
TO RANKLE BECAUSE OF MINTOFF'S SECRETIVENESS AND "FATHER
KNOWS BEST" ATTITUDE ABOUT IT. SMITH

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